



United States Embassy Asmara, Eritrea

ART in Embassies Exhibition

COVER

Arbe Bareis, **Standing Alone**, 2006

Oil on canvas, 25 x 31 in. (63,5 x 78,7 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

INTRODUCTION

Jane and I warmly welcome you to the Residence of the United States Ambassador to Eritrea. We are honored to exhibit the works of six talented American artists, all of whom have a connection to Iowa, the state both Jane and I call home. As Eritrea and Iowa both have strong agricultural traditions, we thought it fitting to highlight some connections with the soil that provide the basis for sustenance, community, values, and outlook that perhaps transcend the great distances between our original home in Iowa and our present home in Eritrea.

One sometimes hears the motto, "Eritrea: Three Seasons in Two Hours." In the short distance between high, cool Asmara (7,700 feet above sea level) and the steamy Red Sea Coast, the traveler passes through a number of microclimates. While the calendar brings only modest swings in climate in Eritrea, the very different seasons of the upper Midwest provide an elemental rhythm that deeply affects our farming state. We have chosen primarily landscapes that reflect this dynamic. Fred Easker's evocative *Near Waukon* captures the fertile hopefulness of Spring. Summer is present in Marcia Wegman's serene *Iowa Summer Corn Fields* and Fred Easker's *Summer View, near Mt. Ayr*. Autumn, with its harvest season, is represented in



the striking still-life oils of Arbe Bareis' *The Dance* and *Standing Alone*, and in the rich colors of Marcia Wegman's pastel *Iowa Fall Corn Fields*. Fred Easker's starkly brilliant *Winter on Blue Creek* reflects aspects of Iowa's deep-freeze Winter, as does the oldest work in the collection, *Hayfield, Minnesota*, a watercolor of

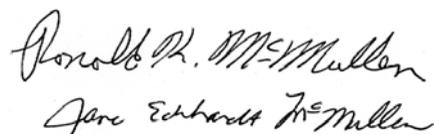
a small Midwestern town painted by Atlanta Constance Sampson during a brief train stop on her way to college in 1917.

Iowa and Eritrea are collages of people, landscapes, and cultures. Mindful of this diversity, we note the variety of artistic media that these six artists have used in their work. By far the most inclusive use of different media is found in Velga Easker's quilt-like *Eastern Iowa Landscape*, in which she incorporates envelopes, maps, cancelled postage stamps, stitching, and a transparent overlay. Other artists have chosen oil on canvas or linen, pastel on paper, or watercolors. A young, frugal Atlanta Constance Sampson painted the watercolor *Hollyhocks* on the back of another work, making it one of her now-prized double-sided paintings. Linda Pepper's *Just Like the Night*, a graphite drawing on rag paper, stands out in its subtle play of light and dark with blurring shades of grey, black, and white that invite the viewer in for a closer look.

The most overtly political work in the exhibition, at least in the Eritrean context, is Linda Pepper's wonderfully satirical *A Typical Conversation*, in which two chairs share an intimate space but face different directions. On the day the artwork was uncrated in Asmara, we invited another diplomat to the Residence for lunch. He responded to Pepper's work with a comment on the need to foster dialogue, communication, and understanding – just the sort of message we want to promote. Linda is a friend we got to know best during our days at the University of Iowa, where her husband, not surprisingly, was a professor of communication.

We are grateful to the artists and lenders who have shared these marvelous works of art with us. While Iowa may be 7,000 miles away, this exhibition makes us feel at home. More importantly, these works may

help bridge the differences that currently divide the United States and Eritrea. If promoting dialogue, starting conversations, and stressing common ground is the essence of diplomacy, then the artists exhibited in our Residence are truly American diplomats. We'd like to thank the ART in Embassies staff, particularly curator Sally Mansfield and publications editor Marcia Mayo, for making this exhibition and publication possible.



**Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen
and Jane E. McMullen**

Asmara, Eritrea

The ART in Embassies Program

Founded in 1964, the U.S. Department of State ART in Embassies Program is a unique blend of art and diplomacy. Through exhibitions with diverse themes and content, ART presents more than 3,500 original works of art by U.S. citizens in a variety of media and styles. They are obtained through loan from sources that include museums, galleries, corporations, artists, and private collectors, and displayed in the public rooms of some 180 U.S. Embassy residences and diplomatic missions worldwide.

The ART exhibitions are a source of great pride to U.S. ambassadors, assisting them to reach the host country's educational, cultural, business, and diplomatic communities. In viewing the exhibitions, the thousands of guests who visit U.S. Embassy residences each year have the opportunity to learn about our nation – its history, customs, values, and aspirations – by experiencing American art firsthand. Detailed information about the Program may be obtained by accessing the ART web site, <http://aiep.state.gov>.

ARBE BAREIS

(born 1960)

“In my work, the still life provides a window into a complex world of dynamic interplay that metaphorically engages human interaction. The underlying theme is one that questions roles and relationships, inviting the viewer to open new channels of thought regarding art and its relationship to the contemporary world.

The Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century hold a special fascination for me. As in many Dutch still lifes, I use subtle glazes, color, compositional relationships, and dramatic lighting to give the objects a translation into painted form. I use dark brown, black, or neutral backgrounds, creating a sense of void in time and space rather than a realistic or natural setting. Combined with dramatic lighting, this *tenebrism* sets the stage for a theatrical presentation unfolding in a timeless space.

The surface effects in my paintings are an entry point, inviting the viewer to consider the deeper meaning of the objects. I create tableaux using such objects as taxidermied birds and snakes, fruit and dried gourds, all at the prime of their magnificence, all posed as actors in conversation with each other. In addition, I use man-made objects that reflect nature and mirror the natural world, creating interactions that are tempered with dry humor. The paintings transcend realism into a realm of artifice, mirroring the roles humans play.”

Arbe Bareis started painting in 1999. He received Master of Art and Master of Fine Art degrees in painting from the University of Iowa, and has exhibited both nationally and internationally. In addition to his work as a painter, Bareis is the Fine and Performing Arts Specialist at Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Curator of the college gallery. He teaches a variety of art classes at Kirkwood, and has taught drawing and painting at the University of Iowa.

ARBE BAREIS



Standing Alone, 2006

Oil on canvas, 25 x 31 in. (63,5 x 78,7 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

ARBE BAREIS



The Dance, 2006

Oil on canvas, 25 x 32 in. (63,5 x 81,3 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

FRED EASKER

(born 1944)

“Most of my paintings are based on the rural landscape within an hour drive from my home in Eastern Iowa. A gently rolling former prairie, I am attracted to its melodious, abstract and subtle beauty and understated energy. It is an area to which I am connected; it is where I grew up. I have worked to develop a personal response to this familiar environment, endeavoring to make something extraordinary from what some would call banal.”

Fred Easker’s work is included in museum, corporate, and private collections throughout the Midwest, and has appeared in a number of periodicals and books. He was an Arts Midwest/National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship recipient in 1997. Easker is represented by galleries in New York City; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Cedar Rapids, Iowa.



Winter on Blue Creek, 2005

Giclée print on paper, 17 x 34 in. (43,2 x 86,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

FRED EASKER



Near Waukon, 2007
Oil on canvas, 6 x 24 in. (15,2 x 61 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Cedar Rapids, Iowa



Summer View, near Mt. Ayr, 1999
Giclée print on paper, 11 x 44 in. (27,9 x 111,8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

VELGA EASKER

(born 1943)

“As a child émigré from Latvia, I enjoyed a rich bicultural upbringing which encouraged a unique perspective on my surroundings. After earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in art from the University of Iowa, I pursued my exploration in visual arts, while maintaining a career path in various aspects of human service.

For the last 17 years I have been intrigued by the possibilities of using societal discards and manipulating them to discover new combinations and inventive images which often reference the ingenious and artistic expressions of early quilters.

My work has been included in regional and national competitive exhibitions, one-person and group shows, corporate collections, and collaborative projects.”



*Eastern Iowa Landscape, undated
Envelopes, cancelled postage stamps,
transparency overlay, machine stitching
28 x 28 (71,1 x 71,1 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Cedar Rapids, Iowa*

LINDA PEPPER

(born 1948)

"If you ask me what motivates my work, why I make these things, I can only answer: because I need and want to ... because my world, for as long as I can remember, has always included making things with my hands. Ordering, interpreting, understanding, expressing. This is a world of apparent contradictions, one that fuses exterior and interior vision. It may be difficult to separate the world outside and the world within – to distinguish the universal and the personal. What happens here may only happen in a 'painted world' but it is not exclusionary. You are invited in."

Just Like the Night, 2006

Graphite on rag paper

18 x 36 in. (45,7 x 91,4 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Chevy Chase, Maryland

Linda Pepper was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1948. She attended the University of Wisconsin, Madison, as an art major with a concentration in metal working. Pepper transferred to the University of Iowa in Iowa City, where she changed her major to painting with a minor in drawing. Since 1982 Pepper has lived in the Washington, D.C. area, where she has worked as a volunteer at the Smithsonian Institution in Design and Production and taught in the Corcoran Gallery of Art summer program. Currently, she is the Congressional Art Competition Coordinator for Maryland Congressman Chris Van Hollen. Pepper continues to draw and paint using a variety of media – oil, watercolor, graphite, and ink on surfaces ranging from linen to folding wooden screens – and to exhibit nationally. Her work is included in corporate, private, and public collections, including the University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City.



LINDA PEPPER



A Typical Conversation, 1997

Oil on linen, 24 x 30 in. (61 x 76,2 cm)

Courtesy of the artist, Chevy Chase, Maryland

ATLANTA CONSTANCE SAMPSON

(1896-1995)

In a 1988 interview with *The New York Times*, Atlanta Sampson, then ninety-one, said of her career as an artist: "It was just as necessary as eating and sleeping for me to paint. It was an obsession all my life. It was an inner drive all my life. It was God's plan."

Sampson was born in 1896 on a farm north of Toeterville, Iowa, near the Minnesota border. As a child she obtained watercolor paints by mail-order from Chicago in order to start painting. After high school it took her two years to convince her Norwegian born parents that it was important for her to study art at the University of Minnesota, from which she received her degree in 1923. Upon graduation Sampson moved to Detroit, Michigan, where she taught art in the public schools for twenty years.

In 1947 Sampson moved to New York City to pursue a career as an artist, which proved to be a struggle. Although she sold few works and had to take temporary jobs to get by, Sampson never gave up. She continued to study, taking classes with famed artist and teacher Hans Hoffman in Provincetown, Massachusetts in the summer, and enrolling in the Art Students League in New York with teachers Theodore Stamos and Thomas Fogerty, among others. At age eighty-four she received a full scholarship to attend the Art Students League.

At the age of ninety, and in failing health, Sampson resigned herself to moving back to Iowa, her dream of a one-woman show in a prominent gallery having eluded her. The deli downstairs from her tiny apart-

ment offered to give her a farewell show, at which she was at last discovered. *True Colors: The Paintings of Atlanta Constance Sampson, 1896-Present* opened in May of 1988 at the National Arts Club in New York City, and many exhibitions followed, including one in the rotunda of the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. on her ninety-sixth birthday. Sampson finally succeeded, before she died, one year short of her hundredth birthday. Her work is owned by collectors across the country, and her art and her spirit are celebrated in the Unionhurst Gallery in Toeterville, Iowa, which is overseen by her nephew, Fred Langrock.

Gregory Jaynes, "About New York; An Artist at 91: Her First Show Outside the Deli," *The New York Times* (April 20, 1988)

www.atlantasampson.com

Hayfield, Minnesota

In 1917 Sampson was on a train traveling to the University of Minnesota, when the north bound train stopped several hours to allow the east-west train to pass. Atlanta painted downtown Hayfield as she saw it from the depot corner where the train had stopped.

Hollyhocks

In 1924 Sampson came home for summer vacation after a year of teaching in Detroit, to paint hollyhocks that grew outside the kitchen window on her parents' farm north of Toeterville, Iowa.

ATLANTA CONSTANCE **SAMPSON**



Hayfield, Minnesota, 1917
Watercolor, 18 x 22 in. (45,7 x 55,9 cm)
Courtesy of the Unionhurst Art Gallery, Toeterville, Iowa

ATLANTA CONSTANCE **SAMPSON**



Hollyhocks, 1924

Watercolor; 21 x 16 in. (53,3 x 40,6 cm)

Courtesy of the Unionhurst Art Gallery, Toeterville, Iowa

MARCIA WEGMAN

(born 1935)

“The Midwest landscape has surrounded me all my life, first in Ohio, then in Iowa. I delight in showing with my paintings that Iowa is anything but boring, as many people perceive it to be. Each month of the year I find a subtle beauty that I never tire of exploring. The most exciting aspect of any landscape is the quality of the light that illuminates the natural and man made forms. The drama can be heightened by the way the light, and thus the shadows, are depicted. Pastels lend themselves to developing the ephemeral aspects of light and color in the landscape. I enjoy challenging myself in constantly finding new ways to explore the forms, rhythm, lines, repetition, light and color in the Iowa landscape.

The sky is a very important element in all my paintings. Observing the light, color and forms in the sky throughout the day, and the year, has become a very major part of my discipline as an artist. Since I work totally from photographs I have taken, I have the liberty to pair any sky with any land. A change in the sky has the potential to change an ordinary landscape into something of breathtaking beauty. Nature’s possibilities are endless.”

Marcia Wegman grew up in Columbus, Ohio, and was interested in art from an early age. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a major in graphic design from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and a Master of Fine Arts degree in printmaking from the University of Iowa, Iowa City, in 1961.

For fifteen years Wegman worked with her husband to establish a retail store and raised two children, but in 1977 a drawing and watercolor class returned her to art. She experimented with a variety of media, however it was a walking trip in the Lake District of England that inspired her to try pastel. It has become her primary medium for its immediacy and directness in capturing the essence of light. Wegman works entirely from photographs she takes along Iowa country roads. She often combines elements of two or three photographs into a single work.

MARCIA WEGMAN



Iowa Fall Corn Fields, 2007
Pastel on paper
31 x 38 in. (78,7 x 96,5 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Iowa City, Iowa

MARCIA WEGMAN



Iowa Summer Corn Fields, 2007
Pastel on paper
31 x 38 in. (78,7 x 96,5 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Iowa City, Iowa

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